

Getting here and advice about your stay

Entry requirements

Visas

British nationals will need a visa to travel to Russia, and it can take approximately four weeks to process most visa applications.

All applicants based in the UK aged 12 or over will need to visit a visa application centre in London, Manchester or Edinburgh to submit biometric data (scanned fingerprints).

Visa and immigration laws are strictly enforced so if you intend to stay in Russia beyond the date on your visa you will need to arrange an extension before it expires, or risk the possibility of fines, court hearings, or even deportation and a ban from re-entry.

Passport validity

Your passport should be valid for a minimum of six months beyond the expiry date of your visa.

Dual nationality

If you have dual British and Russian nationality and enter on your Russian passport you will not be able to leave if the date on your Russian passport expires.

[Source – Foreign Travel Advice, Russia/gov.uk]

Money

The currency in Russia is the Russian Ruble (RUB).

ATMs are common and credit and debit cards are widely used in major Russian cities, but ensure you advise your card provider that you are visiting Russia, to avoid it being blocked.

It is illegal to pay for general transactions with Dollars or Euros, but you can exchange them for Rubles at banks, hotels or airport exchange bureaux.

[Source – Foreign Travel Advice, Russia/gov.uk]

Local laws and customs

Passport checks

Passports must be carried at all times. Police carry out random checks, and you can be fined if you are unable to produce your passport when asked.

Drugs

Long prison sentences are normal for possession of even small quantities of drugs.

Photography

You can be arrested for photographing military establishments or sites of strategic importance such as airports.

LGBT+ travellers

Attitudes towards LGBT+ issues in Russia are generally less tolerant than in the UK, particularly in rural areas. Homosexuality is not illegal in Russia, however, Moscow Pride was banned for 100 years in 2012.

In 2018 Russia was ranked 45th out of 49 European countries for LGBT+ rights by ILGA-Europe. See: <https://rainbow-europe.org/#8656/0/0> for further information about the situation in Russia.

For LGBT+ community advice and guidance visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice> before you travel.

Religious activities

Certain religious activities such as preaching and distributing religious literature are restricted, and some religious groups can be harassed by the authorities. You should take particular care not to become involved.

IT

Access to some internet sites can be unreliable, and you should be aware that there are restrictions in place on some social media platforms. Visit the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media at: <http://eng.rkn.gov.ru/> and the UK National Cyber Security Centre at: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/blog-post/avoid-scoring-cyber-security-own-goal-summer> for more information.

You can contact the emergency services by calling 112.

[Source – Foreign Travel Advice, Russia/gov.uk]

Safety and security

Crime

Most visits to Russia are trouble-free, but petty crime such as mugging, pick-pocketing and theft in main tourist areas, railway concourses, and from vehicles and hotel rooms does exist. Look after your passport at all times, especially in major transport hubs and busy areas in airports.

Official-looking taxis may be unlicensed, so you should consider using taxi apps to ensure they are safe, or ask your hotel to get a taxi for you. Do not flag down taxis or share with a stranger, and wherever possible agree the fare before getting into a taxi or check that the meter is working.

Foreign visitors are not usually the targets of violent crime. However, tourists have been targeted by well-organised gangs in St Petersburg.

Bogus police officers have harassed and robbed tourists. If you are stopped, always insist on seeing their identification, and report harassment or crimes to the British Embassy.

Demonstrations

Although political demonstrations and rallies do sometimes occur in cities and towns across Russia, these usually have prior permission from the authorities. However, it is advisable to avoid unauthorised demonstrations, particularly as these can lead to violence.

Even though not all rallies are publicised in advance, it is best to check local media for information, be vigilant, and avoid any demonstrations.

Scams

Be wary of sending money to any organisations you do not know are genuine, or to individuals you have not met, as scams are not uncommon and a number of people have been victims of fraud.

[Source – Foreign Travel Advice, Russia/gov.uk]

Local travel

Consular support can be severely limited in some parts of Russia such as the North Caucasus, due to security situations. The Russian authorities take a particularly strict

attitude towards security and compliance with visa and registration rules, and short-term travel restrictions can be applied at very short notice.

Road travel

To bring a vehicle into Russia you will need to declare it to customs at the point of entry, but it will not be liable for import taxes for one year.

Due to the vast distances, heavy traffic in major cities and poor road conditions, travel can take a long time. Do not drive alone at night or sleep in your vehicle on the side of the road, and do not pick up hitchhikers.

Road safety is poor, with high numbers of traffic accidents. Make sure you are vigilant when driving, try not to drive at night if possible and always take into account the weather conditions.

In Russia it is against the law to drink and drive, with a zero tolerance policy in place. Be aware that it is common for motorists to be stopped by traffic police in order to carry out spot checks.

For information and advice on driving in Russia and compulsory documentation and equipment, visit the AA and RAC sites at: <https://www.theaa.com/european-breakdown-cover/driving-in-europe/country-by-country> and <https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/travel/country/russia/>.

Rail travel

Railway stations in Russia have airport-style security with checking of bags and passengers. If you are in a sleeping compartment make sure that it is always secure and do not leave it unoccupied.

Air travel

The quantity of carry-on items permitted in hand-luggage is limited in Russia. Check details with your airline or visit the Federal Air Transport Agency site (in Russian) at: <https://www.favt.ru/> before you travel.

Travel by helicopter is often used in remote areas of Russia. Be aware of the increased risk of travel by helicopter and satisfy yourself of the operator's safety record.

Disabled access

Disabled facilities vary across Russia, and can be poor or even non-existent.

Terrorism

Terrorist attacks are likely in Russia, particularly in the North Caucasus. However you need to remain vigilant as indiscriminate attacks – particularly in public places such as major transport hubs, tourist sites and crowded areas in other major cities and regions – cannot be ruled out.

Visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reduce-your-risk-from-terrorism-while-abroad> to find out how to minimise your risk and what to do in the event of a terrorist attack.

Arctic travel

The Arctic is a vast region, and although large numbers of visitors travel there safely each year, it is important to be aware of the danger of adverse weather, and also that many destinations are extremely remote from search and rescue, evacuation and medical facilities.

If travelling independently you are particularly advised to develop contingency arrangements. Always make sure you have adequate travel insurance and accessible funds to cover the cost of any medical treatment or potential repatriation.

[Source – Foreign Travel Advice, Russia/gov.uk]

Health

You should visit your GP or health provider a minimum of four-to-six weeks prior to travelling to Russia. This is an opportunity to assess any health risks specific to you or the country itself and will allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Visit the Russia-specific pages of the TravelHealthPro website at: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/186/russia> for more information.

You can also receive useful information, advice and guidance from the NHS via the FitForTravel website at <https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations> or the NHS Choices website at: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/>.

Some medicines prescribed or purchased in the UK can be of an alternative legal status and regulations surrounding their usage may vary in other countries. If it is necessary for you to travel with either prescription or over-the-counter medication you should consult the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) or TravelHealthPro at: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/43/medicines-abroad>.

Most prescription and over-the-counter medication can be brought into Russia if it is for your personal use, although you will need to bring a notarised Russian-language prescription in your name if your medication contains narcotic or psychoactive substances.

You should take a copy of your prescription or a letter from your doctor to confirm that you are required to take the medication you are carrying. If you are unsure whether you need to provide a prescription and notarised translation, check with the Russian Embassy before travelling. It is worthwhile to take surplus medication with you, as some medicines are not readily available, or may be counterfeit.

European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) are not valid in Russia, and the reciprocal healthcare agreement between the UK and Russia ended in 2016.

You should be aware that medical care in most of Russia is below Western standards, and hospitals do not accept all cases. Cash or credit card payments are the norm in advance of treatment.

112 is the single number for any emergency service in Russia.

[Source – Foreign Travel Advice, Russia/gov.uk]

FCO foreign travel advice

If you are travelling to Russia for business, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) website has travel advice to help you prepare for your visit overseas and to stay safe and secure while you are there.

For up-to-the-minute advice please visit the Foreign Travel section pages on the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/russia>.

Travel insurance

You should ensure you have comprehensive travel and medical insurance before you travel.

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